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TOWARDS A CULTURE OF PEACE

Letter dated 31 October 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Kyrgyzstan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit the text of the message by the participants in the Issyk-Kul Forum to the world's political leaders and the international community, and also the message to the peoples and Governments of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, both adopted by the participants in the Issyk-Kul Forum in Bishkek on 18 July 1997 (annexes 1 and 2).

I should be grateful if you would circulate the text of this letter and its annexes as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 156.

(Signed) Zamira ESHMAMBETOVA
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to the United Nations

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ANNEX I

Message from the participants in the Issyk-Kul Forum-1997 to the world's political leaders and the international community, adopted in Bishkek on 18 July 1997

1. It is 10 years since the first meeting of the participants in the Issyk-Kul Forum. In the declaration adopted then, the participants emphasized that new ideas must be disseminated in all areas of our life, including politics, thus creating new ways of thinking in each country; they also declared that the future must not depend only on decisions taken by politicians and on confrontations between individual Powers.

2. Thus the Issyk-Kul Forum, as a club of intellectuals, proved to be one of the first harbingers of the epoch-making changes that were to come. Over the past 10 years, the appearance of the world has changed beyond recognition; the cold war is a thing of the past, dozens of newly independent States have appeared on the map, and the idea of democracy has become the criterion of political values. New models of thinking and the ethics of inter-State relations are becoming firmly established.

3. However, the hopes of peoples for peace and development in the post-confrontation era have not been entirely fulfilled. The unprecedented possibilities for progress are accompanied by deep-seated turmoil. The spectre of ethnic and religious intolerance and violence hovers over the planet, and mankind is living through a dramatic phase in its history. One of the main dangers is that of conflicts at the interfaces between different cultures and civilizations.

4. Precisely for this reason we, the participants in the Issyk-Kul Forum - writers and politicians, artists and scientists - felt it necessary to meet again in 1997 in order to analyse together the new paradigm of history and spiritual evolution. As the topic of our meeting, we selected "Global and national aspects of culture in the twenty-first century".

The main challenges of the modern world are associated with the clash between two trends, globalization and fragmentation of world development. The first trend, which is creating a global information culture as one of the main features of the emerging universal civilization, at the same time poses threats to the existence of cultural diversity. The second, like an explosion, is stimulating the active growth of national self-awareness which brings with it the danger of national isolation and alienation.

5. We see the strengthening of a culture of peace and tolerance, forming a bridge to the triumph of democratic principles in relations between individuals, ethnic groups, religions and States as a way of preventing conflicts, as striking a balance between these two trends.

6. We are unanimously of the view that mankind's cultural diversity is an essential prerequisite for the maintenance of alternative paths to the further development of mankind.

We assert that interaction between different civilizations and cultures, each of which is undoubtedly the repository of the collective experience of part of mankind accumulated over centuries, and possesses its own potential for the improvement of mankind as a whole, is both possible and beneficial.

We warn mankind against the danger of a levelling down of cultures - a danger created by the standardization of mass culture - but we also warn peoples against ethnocentrism and the artificial proliferation of ethnic groups and their cultures.

We call on peoples not to call in question the values of freedom and democracy and their ability to bring peace about by releasing the potential of all human societies in existence on the planet, and we call on peoples to guard against authoritarianism and the "iron fist" philosophy.

7. In that they possess vast powers and resources - economic, social, cultural and informational and human - it is in the first place Governments that are capable of resisting the degeneration and increasing savagery of social life and national self-awareness. On the threshold of a new century, the highest priority must be attached to this task.

We call on the world's political leaders:

To use the opportunities available to them not to divide up spheres of influence, but to devise a new world order in which, on the basis of equality of rights and mutual respect, account would be taken of the interests of all peoples;

To assign to the culture of peace the priority place which was previously assigned to the culture of war; the threat to security has its roots not "abroad", but within our societies;

To develop a policy and economy of culture which would open up possibilities of maintaining its distinctiveness, together of that with other cultures, within and outside our countries;

To recognize to the full the existing dangers and challenges arising from the insufficient attention being paid to preventing the causes of ethno-religious and social conflicts and their impact on the development of national cultures;

To pay closer attention to the intellectual, scientific, and artistic communities when drawing up policies, especially in cases where specialized knowledge can have an impact on political disputes;

To react sensitively to the continuous transformation of national cultures under the impact of the mass culture of the information age;

To bear in mind that pride in the national language and national culture must never be transformed into rejection of the language and culture of others;

To make education, from the outset and on a life-long basis, the study of non-exclusionary "co-existence" with other cultures, other linguistic and ethnic communities or other religious communities.

8. We call on artists and scientists to proclaim a moratorium on the use of the historical memory of peoples to incite vengefulness and efforts to correct the mistakes of history by force.

9. We call on those who serve God to use their influence to maintain man's sacred need for faith, and to prevent religions from being transformed into a religious factor in politics or being used for ignoble purposes.

10. We call on all those who have their countries' interests at heart to show tolerance towards their neighbours, near and far, for today we are all neighbours on this planet, and we do not and never will have another one like it.

11. The international community needs to pay increased attention to Central Asia, which has a unique historical opportunity in the emerging world order of the twenty-first century, and at the same time is a special instance of the worldwide trends that are making themselves apparent in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, the Middle East, the Transcaucasus, Africa and other regions of the world. By studying these trends, lessons can be drawn for the international community as a whole.

12. We welcome the efforts being made both in Kyrgyzstan and in the other central Asian countries to understand the challenges they face, seek appropriate answers and consolidate the actions of States and civil society to this end. In this context, the establishment in Bishkek of the Institute for the Culture of Peace and the sustainable development of C
entral Asia with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) will be important steps.

13. The meaning of civilization is multiculturalism. This is the only acceptable and realistic idea of the present and the future. The cultures of small peoples are equal and irreproducible in their unique distinctiveness and the multiplicity of their hues.

Since they feel that they belong to a specific culture, people do not always recognize that its underlying semantic values take on linguistic form and, in their highest manifestation, are embodied in books.

Books and enlightenment are inseparably related to one another. By drawing on the powerful information forces of the modern world, they are capable of extinguishing conflicts and generating progress.

We believe that it would be appropriate to proclaim a Day of Books as a national holiday of sovereign States. Kyrgyzstan could become the initiator of such a move and a symbol of a fact that on the threshold of the twenty-first century, an Age of Enlightenment is beginning in Central Asia.

And from Central Asia the Age of Enlightenment can spread to the entire planet and give impetus to a movement for the intellectual rapprochement of civilizations in the twenty-first century. This modest but real step will create a spiritual barrier in the path of the forces proclaiming the idea of a conflict of civilizations.

14. Our hopes are not utopian. We believe in the creative powers of reason. It is important to unite the efforts of peoples and States, not to let slip the historic opportunity and to make the right choice.

ANNEX II

Message to the peoples and Governments of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan, adopted in Bishkek on 18 July 1997 by the participants in the Issyk-Kul Forum

From ancient times, Central Asia has been regarded as one of the cradles of human civilization. Unique natural and geopolitical factors have predetermined the close historical and ethnic, geographical, cultural and linguistic community among the peoples inhabiting the States of the region.

Central Asia has always been at the junction of various centres of power and civilizations, and has experienced the consequences of all kinds of conflicts and wars. But despite everything, the peoples have been able to preserve and multiply examples of the highest culture. Openness and patience are inherent in their mentality.

The reform years of the post-Soviet period have brought many new trials. The strength of the tradition of good relations and good neighbourliness has been put to the test many times. And yet wisdom and a balanced viewpoint have always won out over the passions of the moment.

We are sure that the weakening and elimination of the impulses of inter-ethnic and interreligious tension will facilitate multilateral work to strengthen an atmosphere of mutual understanding, harmony and tolerance. We welcome the efforts of the central Asian countries to coordinate the natural process of consolidation of ethnic groups and development of national statehood with the establishment of a reliable mechanism for safeguarding human rights. The development of bilateral inter-State relations on the basis of the norms of international law has become a guarantee of the successful conduct of this policy. A step towards multilateral cooperation was the establishment of the Inter-State Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan. The policy of civilized economic and socio-cultural regionalism reflects the worldwide trend to integration of countries in various regions of the world in order to survive and to reaffirmation of the culture of peace.

In the difficult process of transition to a market economy, the countries of the region are encountering numerous problems and risk factors. We are concerned by the heightening of competition among various interest groups for redistribution of vital resources and for economic, political and spiritual domination. As an ideological cover for their true intentions, they frequently use various kinds of mystical ideas about the meaning of national cultures, predestination of religions and interaction of civilizations.

Trends of this kind can create complex socio-psychological stratifications and involuntarily give rise to tension instead of inducing States and peoples to cooperate, by creating conditions under which they can slide down from the peaks

of rising national self-awareness into the abyss of national exclusiveness and the temptation to assert their own supremacy and dominate others.

We support the State policy of the countries of the region aimed at maintaining civil peace and inter-ethnic harmony and establishing a legislative and legal base and social climate that promote the peaceful coexistence of various cultures and ideologies and facilitate openness between various social communities, ethnic groups and faiths. A policy of this kind must be based on the principle of rooting the socio-economic, political and cultural structures of society in the native soil. Social reforms can be successful only if they take into account the national cultural identity and distinctiveness of peoples. This necessitates flexible adaptation of the values of modern technological civilization to the specific historical circumstances of the countries of the region.

We express the hope that society and the political leadership in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan will react sensitively to the emerging problems and find appropriate ways of solving them.

A firm orientation towards these vital components of the culture of peace and tolerance will enable the countries of Central Asia to exist as civilized States, take their due place in the international arena and make their contribution to the global context of efforts to create the civilization of the coming century.